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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRAQ: PUK "PM" BARHAM SALIH ON TURKISH
INTERVENTION/MULTI-PARTY TALKS, UNIFICATION WITH KDP,
KIRKUK AND BADR CORPS PRESENCE IN N.IRAQ

REF: A. ANKARA 1391

[B](#). ANKARA 1374

[C](#). ANKARA 1360

Classified by Political-Military Affairs Counselor Stuart
Brown. Reasons 1.5 b and d.

Summary

[1](#). (S/NF) Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) "Prime Minister" Barham Salih met with Operation Northern Watch POLAD March 7 in Ankara. Salih planned to raise with Turkish MFA and military officials later in the day what he characterized as the strong, grass-roots objections of the vast majority of northern Iraq's people to any Turkish intervention there, and to note that Turkey was, by planning a cross-border move and discussing it in public, making Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) leader Masoud Barzani a local hero. Salih also planned to tell the Turks that Turkey's humanitarian assistance plan needed to be coordinated and shared with the KDP and PUK, who administer the area, in order to harmonize efforts, avoid duplication and waste resources, and to avoid misunderstandings. So far, he told us, no such effort has been made. When we asked him if there were plans for follow-up to the TGS-KDP-PUK-Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF) meeting on military planning that took place Feb. 17 in Silopi, Turkey, Salih said the Iraqi Kurds would only agree if the USG sent a representative to the next round. On Kirkuk, Salih said that the PUK could prevent displaced Kurds from rushing back to Kirkuk if Washington made a public commitment to the return of all the displaced through a legal, political process. Salih briefed us on his detailed proposal to unify KDP and PUK administrations now being considered by the KDP. End summary.

Ideally, Zero Turkish Troops

[2](#). (S/NF) In Ankara for talks with Turkish MFA and military officials, PUK "PM" Salih met with ONW POLAD March 7. Salih said he would leave Turkey for Washington March 8 and that he would be in Washington for a week, and asked for assistance in getting as many appointments in Washington as possible. We asked Salih how he would like to see Turkish involvement in northern Iraq during possible US military operations. Salih replied, "Ideally, there would be zero Turkish military involvement. If push comes to shove and the coalition needs Turkey to be involved, we will need assurances that our political rights will be protected, that Turkey will not get involved in Iraqi Kurd-Turkoman politics, and that we will have the right to tell the Turks to go home. We will need to have clearly defined and agreed to Turkey's mission, rules of engagement and depth of presence."

Military and Humanitarian Coordination Lacking

[3](#). (S/NF) We asked Salih if there were plans for another round of Turkey-KDP/PUK-ITF military talks to follow up the Feb. 17 Silopi meeting. Salih said the Iraqi Kurds were only interested in such a meeting if the US were represented as well. He said the US needed to tell the Turks and the Iraqi Kurds at the same time "the way it was going to be." He noted that Turkey still had not shared with the KDP or PUK

Turkish plans for humanitarian assistance, which Turkey claimed was why its troops needed to cross the border. Salih planned to say to the Turks that such plans must be shared and harmonized with KDP and PUK humanitarian assistance plans to maximize effectiveness, minimize waste and duplication and avoid misunderstandings. He said this was not a political matter, but one of common sense and careful use of limited resources.

Turkey Making Barzani a Hero

14. (S/NF) Salih, who met with KDP leader Masoud Barzani March 5, said he had never seen Barzani so angry, emotional and irreconcilable about anything as he was about the prospect of Turkish military intervention. Salih told us he could not overstate the depth of anger among the people - not just the politically involved - in northern Iraq toward Turkey, and that Barzani was dangerously playing on that anger. Salih planned to tell the Turks that they were making Masoud Barzani a local hero by threatening military intervention in northern Iraq. Salih believed there was potential for a "war within a war" between the Iraqi Kurds and the Turks. Such a situation, he said, would help Iran, and the Iranians would play that card to complicate things for the US. He suspected the recent movement of SCIRI's Badr Brigade forces into northern Iraq may have been designed in part by Iran to draw in the Turks.

Badr Brigade: Iranian Surrogate or Opposition Fighters?

15. (S/NF) Turning to the Badr Brigade presence, Salih confirmed that approximately 1,000 troops were now located near Darbandikan in northern Iraq. They were there, he said, under the terms of a 1996 SCIRI-PUK agreement to coordinate military activity against Saddam Hussein. When we asked what he thought their motivation was for deploying into northern Iraq, he replied, "everyone wants a piece of the pie." Salih said the PUK leadership was split on whether they represented an Iranian surrogate or a legitimate Iraqi opposition force, but the PUK's hand against Iran was too weak to resist them, given the 1996 agreement. Salih said he expected the Badr troops to cooperate against Saddam during the fight, be a possible source of pro-Iranian trouble-making during the transition period, but to assume a legitimate Iraqi role in post-Saddam Iraq.

Need US Commitment on Returnees to Kirkuk

16. (S/NF) When we asked Salih if he thought the PUK could ensure that displaced Kurds would not storm back to Kirkuk as soon as it was liberated (which could trigger a major complicating Turkish response), Salih said that to do so, the PUK would need a public statement from the US guaranteeing a political/legal process of restitution and repatriation that committed to getting people back to their original homes.

KDP-PUK Unification Plans

17. (S/NF) We asked Salih for details on Ref A plans to unify KDP and PUK administrations and peshmerga forces. Salih said that for now, the two parties have agreed to have a joint political-military committee comprised of Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani plus four reps from each side. The PUK reps will be Salih, Khosrat Rasul Ali, Dr. Fuad Masoum, and Nushirwan Mustafa. Salih did not know who the KDP would propose for their reps. Salih said he had sent a letter to Masoud Barzani proposing the following unification plan: The administration would have a single "PM" (the KDP had the option of deciding who that would be); a unified cabinet including at least one Arab minister; two "Deputy PM's" - one Turkoman and one Assyrian (with the ITF to be given first chance at the Turkoman slot - if they refuse, the slot would be offered to another Turkoman); and ministries and subordinate offices would be integrated slowly, one at a time. Salih's plan keeps regional finances separate until resolution of differences over revenue-sharing can be bridged.

18. (S/NF) Salih argued that rapid implementation of this plan

would allow the KDP and PUK to consolidate their position and place them in a powerful spot to advocate federalism, including their areas as one geographic federal unit in the post-Saddam environment. Masoud Barzani told Salih that the two sides needed to sit down and discuss the proposal, and Salih believed Barzani was unenthusiastic, in part because he is riding on a ground-swell of popularity for opposing Turkey. Salih said KDP "PM" Nechirvan Barzani was unhappy with offering a "Deputy PM" slot to the ITF. Still, Salih said, unification could move quickly if it were pushed.

A US-KDP-PKK Plot Against the PUK?

19. (S/NF) Salih told us that a few days ago the local Turkish liaison in Sulaymaniyah had come to him and suggested that the US, the KDP and the PKK/KADEK were working together on a secret plan to marginalize the PUK. We assured him this was

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not true. He said he knew it was not, but wondered what the Turks were up to in suggesting it. Finally, he offered the comment that if the Turks thought ITF Chairman Sanan Aga was the man to protect Turkey's interests, the Turks were sorely mistaken.
PEARSON